

## TOPICALITY AND THE UNIVERSAL: THE STRANGE CASE OF WEILL'S 'DIE BÜRGERSCHAFT'

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KURT WEILL's 3-act opera 'Die Bürgerschaft' was composed in 1931, first performed in 1932, banned by the Nazis in 1933<sup>1</sup>, and not heard again until the autumn of 1957, when it was revived, in a so-called "new version", by the Städtische Oper, Berlin. These are the bare facts of a story which warrants a place in the cultural history of our time.

The story has a prologue. By 1927 Weill had produced three one-act operas and miscellaneous instrumental and orchestral works, all in a fairly advanced style. These had established him, with Hindemith and Křenek, as one of the leaders of the younger generation of German composers. A first-rate technique, evolved during his four years of study with Busoni, and an alert and enquiring mind helped him along a path that might well have led to his adoption of some form of the twelve-note method. But in fact he achieved full maturity and independence with a single, radical change of direction—a tangential movement which, on a lower level, was as daring and as rewarding as Stravinsky's renunciation of the style of his early ballets. Weill's first thoroughly mature score is 'Die Dreigroschenoper' (1928). Most musicians know something of the work, and a detailed description of its stylistic features would doubtless be superfluous. But the *implications* of the style are still not fully appreciated. However simple, or even primitive, Weill's language became in 1928, the musical effect is definably revolutionary: that is to say, it is vigorously opposed to academic conventions and to the stock response. The precariousness of this situation is one of its most remarkable features; for the genre of contemporary popular music is defined by the most rigid conventions (or formulae), and if these are ignored, the music misses its aim. Yet, as an artist "in revolt", Weill was bound to challenge every one of these conventions, and as a musician he had to escape their malignantly anti-musical implications. In the circumstances, an inability to sustain the challenge at *any* point would have resulted not in bad art, but in non-art.

<sup>1</sup> Until very recently it was thought that all copies of the full score had been destroyed by the Nazis.

By choosing to exercise his profound musicality within the very narrow borders of contemporary "commercial" dance idioms, Weill was forced to undertake a surgical operation of great delicacy. Thanks to the extraordinary precision with which he dissected and re-animated every cliché of popular dance music, from the added-sixth chord upwards and outwards, the music of 'Die Dreigroschenoper' and related works has lost nothing, and indeed has acquired an added depth, after thirty years. When one remembers that there is nothing in the whole field of contemporary culture—not even women's fashions—which "dates" so inexorably as the style of dance music, Weill's achievement seems almost incredible. On a purely analytical level, one finds that the spearhead of his attack on convention is a highly disruptive and almost Mahlerian harmonic style that achieves its forcefulness without any recourse to "contemporary" secundal dissonance. For that reason it attacks the *idées reçues* of modernity as fiercely as it does those of the commercial music manufacturers.

The paradoxical durability of Weill's topical ballads should prevent us from misinterpreting the composer's most often quoted declaration: "I don't care about posterity, I write only for the present". So far from being a confession that he had renounced the relatively esoteric style of his early works in order to achieve an easy success by pandering to popular tastes, it refers only to the urgency of his need to communicate. The concept of *Zeitoper*—or, to use a vogue term, "committed" opera—which Weill promulgated was in fact belligerently controversial. In so far as the Nazi movement in the later years of the Weimar republic was an expression of popular sentiment—a complex and fascinating question—Weill's music, and the sentiments from which it is inseparable, could hardly have been more courageously heterodox. 'Die Bürgschaft', which is Weill's most ambitious work, is the classic instance of this. The nature of the work's topicality—that is to say, the extent to which it was involved in the social and political crisis of the time—can only be demonstrated by way of a synopsis of Caspar Neher's libretto. Before attempting such a synopsis—which is necessary in view of the fact that the work did not even survive long enough to receive attention in any reference book—the ground must be prepared, both musically and critically.

The accepted evaluation of Weill, which is embodied in most of the popular guides to modern music, is often founded on the most flimsy musical evidence, and the consequent current of opinion, accumulated over the past quarter-century without any real contact

with the music, must by now be running very powerfully in favour of the suggestion that Weill was an interesting but ephemeral figure. The basis of this evaluation lies in the assumption that he was essentially a satirist. This I believe to be a most damaging misinterpretation. The creative attitude which underlies the blues and foxtrots of (say) 'Die Dreigroschenoper' is one of complete identification with the medium. This becomes even more clear if one compares the 'Dreigroschenoper' pieces with the isolated "jazz" episodes in Weill's early operas. The latter are undoubtedly satirical. The effect of placing inanimate and unresolved clichés (the *objects morts* of dance music) in an alien harmonic context is deliberately grotesque.<sup>2</sup> If there is anything in Weill's music which will "date", it is this fundamentally inorganic satire. It will "date" less disastrously than similar passages in the early operas of Křenek because it is more genuinely felt, but by admitting a proportion of inorganic matter, on whatever pretext, it promotes its own paralysis.

The manner in which Weill's mature jazz pieces establish their own organic principles and admit nothing that is extraneous or nondescript offers, to my way of thinking, convincing evidence that Weill was a composer of unimpeachable seriousness. Once this evidence is accepted, the difficulties of approaching 'Die Bürgschaft' from the standpoint of 'Die Dreigroschenoper' have already begun to diminish. One need no longer be surprised to find that the three years of extraordinarily rapid development which separate the two works took Weill far beyond the field of the idealized cabaret song he had first chosen. For one thing, he re-established contact with the contrapuntal style of his early music—and particularly of such things as the *Choralphantasie* which concludes the string Quartet of 1923. If in one sense the music of 'Die Bürgschaft' is more conservative than that of 'Die Dreigroschenoper', in another it transfers the attack on academicism to a different field: the modern academicism for which Hindemith was unwittingly responsible. This is manifest in the *espressivo* writing which is sustained with astonishing invention throughout the work, even in the most turbulent choral allegros.

But this kind of lyrical writing will not be welcomed by those who accept Weill only as a satirist. It is clear that there are some who are drawn to 'Die Dreigroschenoper' and the other Brechtian works out of the merest *nostalgie de la boue*. They will count themselves among Weill's admirers. Yet they can hardly admit, even to themselves, the reasons for their admiration. So when 'Die Bürgschaft' fails to give the slightest excuse for their kind or any other kind of nostalgic

<sup>2</sup> cf. the jazz and dance elements in Berg's 'Wozzeck', 'Der Wein' and 'Lulu'.

indulgence, they are forced to rationalize their negative response to the work. Conscience ensures a display of sympathy, and the rationalization might run as follows: Weill is an attractive minor figure—a kind of cynical town-cousin to Chabrier, perhaps—and because he is no more than that, the large-scale and tragic ‘Die Bürgschaft’ must be an error of judgment—in fact a kind of ‘Gwendoline’. Criticism motivated in this way is of course quite spurious, but it will be warmly applauded whenever it concerns an undervalued artist whose proper valuation might upset the æsthetic stock-market. ‘Die Bürgschaft’ is the only work in which Weill reveals every facet of his surprisingly complex personality. If it can be dismissed as a failure, then Weill himself is reduced to more manageable proportions. But in fact ‘Die Bürgschaft’ cannot be considered in isolation from its predecessor, ‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny’ (1930, libretto in 3 acts by Brecht). Brecht described ‘Mahagonny’ as an anti-opera, and his conception of the musical theatre imposed on Weill the most severe restrictions with regard to form, texture and phrase-structure. The ferocious declamatory style of the music, with its sharply protesting woodwind and brass orchestration and its predominantly homophonic textures, is an inspired solution to the problems inherent in Brecht’s libretto. But no sacrifice worth making once is worth making twice, and ‘Die Bürgschaft’ is not only very much “pro-opera” (Brecht attacked it as bourgeois!), but it is also an expression of everything that Weill had suppressed in himself while writing ‘Mahagonny’. The classical restraint of the later work balances and explains the anarchic restraint of its predecessor: although the musical muscles may not bulge so aggressively, they have acquired a flexibility that gives them added strength.

Those who pathetically identify themselves with some extra-musical quality in ‘Mahagonny’—its “brutal worldliness” for instance—will dismiss ‘Die Bürgschaft’ as insipid and will condemn Weill for not trying to repeat an earlier success. (The fate of Stravinsky in the hands of the snob admirers of ‘The Rite of Spring’ can also be the fate of a lesser revolutionary.) But if a case is to be made against the opera, it should at least bear some relationship to the musical facts. To claim, for instance, that it is “a lesser work than ‘Die Dreigroschenoper’” on the grounds that “in essence Weill was a miniaturist, whose strong suit lay in his extraordinary ability to conjure up those tart, pungent little songs”, is to disregard the basic compositional features of ‘Die Bürgschaft’. The work is divided into twenty-four numbers, but the long-range relationships, the

sustained developments and the progressive tension in the musico-dramatic design are sometimes almost Verdian in their effect. (Verdi was an unmistakable influence on Weill's operatic style.) If the composer of 'Die Bürgschaft' is a miniaturist, then we must revise our opinion of every number-opera in the repertory.

Peter Heyworth's review<sup>3</sup> of 'Die Bürgschaft', from which the quotation in the previous paragraph is taken, contains other observations which merit attention. His approving description of the twenty-third number as "a night-club scene in which Weill puts to good use his ability to turn a mirror on the enervating yet febrile dance music of the time" indicates that dangerous yearning for another 'Dreigroschenoper'. In truth, the emotional and structural strength of this scene (which incidentally is not set in a night-club, but which is a dual scene showing on one side a dance floor in a city tavern and on the other a hospital ward) has nothing whatever to do with the dubious ability which Mr. Heyworth ascribes to Weill; its power resides in its intimate and dramatically meaningful association with musical elements in the first act and in its crucial relationship to the tonal and rhythmic development of the third act. If this kind of achievement is overlooked, 'Die Bürgschaft' can easily be accounted inferior to 'Die Dreigroschenoper'.

Mr. Heyworth also suggests that the first act is "by far the best", musically. In point of fact no-one has seen the second and third acts, as Weill wrote them, since 1932—both acts were savagely cut in the Berlin revival—and although Mr. Heyworth doubtless derives this opinion from study of the vocal score, I have learnt to my cost that the vocal scores of Weill operas give a very inadequate idea of their orchestral and dramatic realization. But Mr. Heyworth's argument goes farther than the score, or rather, it goes behind it. Having claimed that Weill was much influenced by the Handel revival and the back-to-Bach movement of the 1920s (which is a faulty analysis), he goes on to say, ostensibly in Weill's defence: "But there is pastiche and pastiche, and the term gives no idea of the sureness, strength and memorable beauty which Weill brings again and again to an adopted style". This seems to me a disastrous contention. Aesthetically speaking, there is pastiche . . . and there is art. That is the only real antithesis: the very word "pastiche" implies an uncreative element which is irreconcilable with the idea of a work of art. But if one only hears "pastiche" (however strong

<sup>3</sup> In the 'Observer', 13 October 1957. So far as I know this is the only detailed review of the work to have been published in English.



and sure) in the greater part of 'Die Bürgschaft', then one must go all the way with Mr. Heyworth and arrive at the damaging conclusion that "once Weill leaves the secure haven of Bach and Handel and is unable to exploit the veins that make 'Die Dreigroschenoper' so fascinating, the music turns curiously flavourless and woolly". I submit that these "veins" and "secure havens" are quite illusory, and that the comment is very questionable. In fact, the musical technique is astonishingly precise throughout, and the personal flavour is so strong that the authorship is quite unmistakable at every point, even in the few passages where the inspiration seems to flag.

Whatever differences of opinion are allowable with regard to the quality of 'Die Bürgschaft', there seems little excuse for factually misrepresenting the character of the drama. Here is Mr. Heyworth again: "'Die Bürgschaft' is, of course, like 'Die Dreigroschenoper', conceived as a Marxist criticism of capitalist society". This is a twofold error. 'Die Dreigroschenoper' was not conceived as any such thing: indeed, not long before his death, Brecht denounced the nihilistic conclusions of the work and pointed a Marxist moral. 'Die Bürgschaft' is even more remote from Marxist values. The work is a parable, indeed two parables, about Trust: trust between friends, trust in the social contract, trust in humane values. At mid-point in the work<sup>4</sup> a *peripeteia* is reached, and the remainder is concerned with the betrayal of these forms of trust. In the political and social context of 1931-32 the work could not have been more specifically and bravely anti-Nazi. In the Berlin of 1957 it might have another meaning. But before we can consider the highly debatable character of the revised version which was in fact presented last autumn by the librettist and Carl Ebert, we must examine the opera as Weill conceived it.

The time of the opera is unspecified, as in a myth. The Prologue introduces Johann Mattes, a farmer in the primitive agricultural land of Urb. He is a feckless though avaricious man, and the opera opens with his return from some gambling-party where he has lost all his money. His wife Anna advises him to seek assistance from their friend David Orth, a corn dealer in a neighbouring district. He leaves and is successful in persuading Orth to stand surety for him.

Six years pass, and when the curtain rises on Act 1, Mattes is again in need of Orth's help. He appeals to his friend to sell him some grain. Orth is awaiting new supplies, but eventually agrees to

<sup>4</sup> Up to here, the libretto is founded on a parable by Alexander Herder, 'Der afrikanische Rechtspruch'.

sell him his last two sacks. When Mattes arrives home he finds that a considerable amount of money is hidden at the bottom of one of the sacks. In a superb recitative and aria, "Sie soll nichts wissen", he considers the situation and, after an anguished moral conflict, concludes that he can safely keep the money. However, Orth knows what has happened and in another soliloquy has expressed his trust in his friend. But the time passes, and Mattes does not return with the money.

That evening the two men meet as they go out on the river in their boats, to examine the fishing-nets. The boats are then moored a few yards apart, and even in the pale light of the moon Mattes dare not look Orth in the face. When Orth asks him if he reached home safely with the grain, Mattes is very evasive. However, he is able to find an excuse for leaving when the fog descends and makes further work on the nets impossible. (For the first time in the opera we are confronted with the symbolic theme of blindness, which is to occur again at several crucial points.) The whole of this intensely moving and original scene is expressed in limpid three-part counterpoint which only twice rises above *piano* or *pianissimo*, and with great effect.

When Mattes returns home, he is met by three blackmailers, who have discovered about the money. He refuses to pay for their silence, and they make off towards Orth's house on the other side of the river. At this point Mattes, now thoroughly frightened, sees that he must try to bring the money back to Orth before the blackmailers reveal everything. But they have taken his boat, and he has to cross farther down the river.

The drop-curtain (showing the river) falls, and the small chorus which sits on either side of the stage and comments on the action rises to its feet in excitement at the race between the blackmailers and Mattes. They peer into the auditorium as if scanning the river, and the audience is engulfed in the physical struggle and in the tension of the choral and orchestral writing. The drop-curtain rises, the tension of the foregoing music is discharged into a languorous 9-8 as the blackmailers arrive at Orth's house.

This total "modulation" is not only a masterly stroke from the musical point of view, but it is the work of a born man of the theatre. So too is the pathetic quality which emerges from the sly music, as Mattes enters, dishevelled and out of breath. The blackmailers have not yet had time to extract a promise of money from Orth in exchange for their information, and Mattes offers the money to his "friend". But Orth, representing "ideal" justice, says that he is too late (morally speaking), but that since the two sacks of grain had

been properly paid for, the contents rightly belong to Mattes. He defends his friend from the infuriated denunciation of the blackmailers and suggests that they should both go to the civil court in the city in order to discover who is the legal owner of the money.

The Judge hears the case (Act II) and movingly decides that the money shall be divided between Orth's son and Mattes's daughter. Soon after the judgment a herald enters and announces that a neighbouring Great Power has invaded the land of Urb, and that a Commissar is on his way. Henceforth the land will be governed according to the law of the Great Power. The townspeople enquire amongst themselves concerning this law, and the Judge, full of foreboding, tells them that it is the law of money and the law of force. The Commissar enters with his troops and is met by three would-be collaborators—a trio that appears throughout the opera in various guises (as creditors, thieves, blackmailers and agents). They offer their services, and the Commissar orders his Adjutant to question them. While this interrogation takes place, the Commissar meditates, in a crucial aria, upon his role in the present situation. He is, he says, merely a servant of The System. The System needs new lands if it is to maintain itself, and if he is not prepared to do the dirty work, someone else will. But he is anxious. What if the System is not right? What if it does not endure? He rebukes himself for these unworthy doubts . . . when duty is involved one must not ask questions. The three collaborators are instructed to cheer at a signal that will be given whenever the Commissar makes an important public announcement.

The Commissar now meets the dignitaries of the city and arranges the tasks of government. He asks to see the book wherein the decisions of the Judge are recorded, and he retires with the Judge while the chorus comment on their altercations. After an interlude—dealing, like the other interludes, with Anna Mattes's search for her rebellious daughter—the Commissar emerges and announces that the well-being of the State must come before everything. The Judge is an insidious influence (because, one deduces, he is a supporter of humanitarian principles against totalitarianism) and has been dismissed. The case of Mattes and Orth will be re-tried, as a demonstration of the strength of the New Order. Mattes and Orth are both judged guilty of ill-defined crimes, the money is confiscated by the State, and the pair escape with their lives only on condition that they work for the Great Power. (This condition is one of the very few constructive revisions made for the Berlin revival.) The act closes on this note of triumphant injustice.



When the action is resumed in the third act, a further six years have elapsed. The impoverished people of Urb have been betrayed by the Great Power. They had been promised that industrialization would bring them prosperity, but in fact it has only made the rich richer and the poor poorer. The Great Power goes to war with a rival, and the battle rages across the innocent land of Urb. During the war Mattes and Orth, who have become corrupted by power, concern themselves with nothing but increasing their riches.

The corruption of Mattes was inherent in his character from the very beginning of the opera. But that of Orth has been more subtle. When life was relatively simple, he was able to help his weak friend, even to the point of noble selflessness; but at the same time he could satisfy his love of power by reminding himself that Mattes was not only his friend but his best customer. With the "change of fortune" in the second act, the world of Orth was deprived of the humane values which had enabled the good in him to co-exist with and rise above the fatal materialism. The purely circumstantial power vested in him by the Commissar stimulates a need which otherwise he might never have realized and eventually procures him a personal triumph at the cost of moral damnation. Mattes, on the other hand, must at the last be denied even the worldly consolations of power, for when the only law is the law of the political or economic jungle the man who does not even have faith in his own strength cannot survive.

But for a while both men prosper. Their separation from the humble people to whom they once belonged is reflected in an immensely powerful oratorio-like sequence which owes much to the tradition of medieval mystery plays. The people of Urb are driven, like cattle, through the Four Doors representing the agonies of civilization—War, Economic Chaos (Inflation), Famine and Sickness.

The passage through both the first and second "Door" is marked by a mass choral scene and a contrasted solo scene. In the first solo scene Mattes takes advantage of wartime disorganization to steal cattle, with the aid of three accomplices. In the second Orth sends his son down from the overflowing corn-loft to tell the country people that there is nothing for sale. (He will wait until shortage raises the price of grain.)

The third and fourth "Doors" are single scenes in which solo and choral textures are combined. In the third the people of Urb are stricken with famine, and Mattes sends his accomplices to the Commissar to beg protection in the event of a popular uprising.

The fourth "Door" is the dual scene of the city bar and the hospital ward, referred to above. Dramatically it extends the idea of social disintegration presented by the foregoing "Doors" to the point where it impinges on the relation (in fact the divorce) between the old and the new generation.

This most frightening picture of social anarchy sets the stage for the conflict of the finale which follows (after an orchestral prelude-ritornello). The agents of Mattes are on their way back from the Commissar when they are stopped by an infuriated mob, who accuse them of stealing their cattle. "It was not us", they reply cravenly, "It was Mattes". The agents then hurry to their master and tell him that the Commissar will not help. Despite Mattes's entreaties, they too desert him.

The mob is heard off-stage, crying "Bring Mattes here! Trample on him!" to the music of the ritornello. The whole finale is in the form of a great rondo, and with each recurrence of the ritornello the mob come closer. (One is forcibly reminded of the hunt for Peter Grimes). Mattes, terrified, flees once more to his friend Orth, to ask for help. But Orth is no longer willing to help him. Mattes pleads with him with increasing desperation as the crowd approaches, until at last he strikes him, and they begin to fight. Mattes is blinded with blood and collapses. The crowd are now at the doors of the house. Orth can only see one way of saving himself: through offering his friend as a sacrifice. With terrible, hypocritical tenderness, he lifts Mattes up in his arms, assuring him that he has relented and is carrying him to safety. He brings him forth and lays him at the feet of the crowd. Mattes realizes too late what has happened, and with a cry of utter despair ("Why choose me? Why not you and all the others?") he is swallowed up by the crowd, who trample on him and leave him dying.

The small "commenting chorus" offer their sympathy. But Orth, victorious and utterly damned, is still remorseless. As he kneels alone on the empty stage, by the body of Mattes, he declares: "Everything that happens is according to the law of money and the law of force". The ritornello thunders out once more and the curtain falls.

This final scene of 'Die Bürgschaft' is as painful as anything in opera. The "shocking" final curtains of nineteenth-century opera—from 'La Juive' to 'Aida'—were at least mollified by their sentimental associations, but in 'Die Bürgschaft' the traditional erotic sentiment of opera is replaced, broadly speaking, by ideological and allegorical argument. The nihilistic conclusion of the libretto is a function of the opera's dialectic and not, primarily, of any human drama. The

essential thesis of the opera—that the coherence of society depends upon trust, at every level—is propounded in the first half of the work: the second half is concerned with the antithesis—that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

I have paid tribute elsewhere<sup>5</sup> to the courage shown by the Berlin authorities in presenting the revival of 'Die Bürgschaft' as the central event in their 1957 Festival. The fact that the superb production was in the hands of Carl Ebert, who was responsible for the original 1932 production, helped to emphasize the symbolic significance of the occasion. Here, indeed, was a gesture of reparation to a composer (and hence *all* composers) who died in political exile; a gesture, too, that rejected everything the Nazi cultural dictatorship had stood for, in banning works like 'Die Bürgschaft' and 'Mathis der Maler'. But unfortunately this is only half the story. The 'Bürgschaft' revival was publicized as "the world premiere of the revised version of the opera", but in point of fact, the revisions had been made, after the composer's death, by the librettist, in consultation with Carl Ebert and some unnamed musician. Although they were a well-meaning attempt to make the work as presentable as possible, these revisions directly contradicted the composer's aims in the second and third acts. The first act was merely cut, and with one or two exceptions, the cutting was reasonable enough. But in the second act the Commissar was made a speaking part; essential comments and bridges were dispensed with; and the counter-theme of Anna and her daughter, which is essential to the expressive shape of the work, was reduced to a mere incident. In the third act, the revisions defy brief summary. Viewed as a whole, these alterations suggest that the revival was staged under a shadow—but this time, not of the future, but of the past and the present.

The whole of the second act is crippled by the reduction of the Commissar's role. No longer is one impressed, musically, by the deadening weight of the military occupation and the consequent tyranny. Neher has consolidated this impression by giving the soldiers gay scarlet uniforms that would seem more appropriate to the heyday of British colonialism, whilst the Commissar is dressed as if he were the hero of a tropical adventure film. Understandably, Neher and his associates may have felt that modern audiences, particularly in Germany, would not welcome a reminder of *Lebensraum* policies, military occupations and police-state morality. Whatever the case, the result was ruinous. With no real sense of catastrophe remaining, the formal division in the opera was blurred,

<sup>5</sup> In an article 'The Berlin Festival' published in 'Opera', December 1957.

and the antithetical relationship of the second part to the first could barely be appreciated.

If the mutilation of the second act sprang from an over-awareness of the all-too-recent past, that of the third might well owe something to the realities of the present. The by no means exclusively Marxist references to the division of interests between the rich and the poor which are made at the start of the third act may seem quite harmless when viewed objectively, but with the anti-capitalist government of East Germany just round the corner, it is hard to be objective. The references, and their music, duly disappeared. Likewise, the four Doors changed their functions and their positions: the powerfully austere contrapuntal *Vivace* for chorus and orchestra, representing Economic Inflation, was removed altogether, although this destroyed the vital form of the "mystery play" sequence. The attempt to compensate by making the finale the fourth Door, and calling it Death, is the merest equivocation—it has no dramatic or logical meaning.

So we come to the finale itself. Here indeed was the focal point of the opera's aggressive spirit. But once the changes in emotional tone and character-development had been made in the earlier parts of the opera, the ending could not have remained as Weill had left it. The "instructive" function of the original, nihilistic ending was not compatible with the conventionalized and less didactic tendency of the new version. The key to the situation is, of course, David Orth. By very much toning down Orth's insistence, early in the opera, on the fact that Mattes was his best customer, Neher was already preparing the way for a more comforting conclusion to the drama. Next, Orth's son is made to rebuke and desert his father after he has told the starving people that there is no grain for sale. In the new version Orth breaks down at this point and confesses his fear in an aria whose music is taken from the discarded "Credo" of the Commissar in Act II. Musically and dramatically this is intolerable. The whole point of the second part of the opera is destroyed. Orth *must* become the allegorical expression of power-lust, and if the meaning is to be conveyed, he *must* be remorselessly intransigent.

Once this idea has been lost, the opera is doomed, and a new ending is inevitable. During the fight Mattes is mortally wounded, and both men, suddenly realizing their wickedness, are re-united in the bonds of holy friendship. As in the original, Orth carries Mattes forth, but this time he does so with sweet sincerity. The "betrayal" duet is thus given a sentimental context that is quite alien to the music and is thereby deprived of half its effect. The

crowd stands by peacefully as Orth utters his last words to his dying friend: "Why you then, why not me and all the others?". It is a neat transposition of Mattes's original words; but, given a sharp knife, one can commit any murder neatly. This ending imposes the values of commercial "realistic" theatre on to a play that was conceived, perhaps not too clearly, according to the non-realistic and ideological principles of Brecht's "epic theatre". To have arrived logically at such an ending, the work would have to be freshly conceived, from the very start—a virtually impossible task, even were the composer alive and prepared to undertake it.

In an introductory article on the work, Professor Ebert observes that times have changed since 1932 and that to-day, in the light of our experience, 'Die Bürgschaft' requires a humane ending. Clearly Neher must agree with this; yet without being so presumptuous as to accuse him of misunderstanding his own opera, I should like to suggest very strongly that the work *already has a humane ending*.

In fact, it has two such endings. The first occurs at mid-point in the second act, with the Judge's decision on the case of Mattes and Orth. It is evident that everything which follows is intended only as a warning, an object-lesson: it does not imply any *acceptance* of anti-humanitarian or anarchistic conditions. The libretto has certain dramatic and conceptual flaws which would weaken this interpretation were it not for the clarifying commentary provided by the music. In the third act the music is almost always modifying and interpreting the physical or moral violence of the stage action. (The belligerent Hunger March is the only exception.) This counter-pointing is superb "theatre". The "war" music has none of the harmonic or rhythmic brutality which we find in 'Die Dreigroschenoper' or 'Mahagonny'. On the contrary, it is stiff and wooden, like mechanical music for a puppet play (the only music in the opera which eschews all trace of *espressivo*).

This music presents, by its very character, a full and unmistakable condemnation of violence (from whatever source); and a similar standpoint is manifest in those passages where a lesser artist would have been content with crude satire or facile identification with the degeneracy of the figures in the drama. Thus the duet in which Johann and Anna Mattes sing of their ill-gotten riches, and the scene in which Orth's son dismisses the starving populace, are two of the most lyrical and profoundly pitying things in the opera. This musico-dramatic technique culminates in the music accompanying, or rather objectifying, the ultimate betrayal of Mattes by Orth. Whilst Orth commits an act of consummate perfidiousness, the



music indicates, with almost unbearable serenity, those positive and purely humane values against which all perfidy must be judged if the totality of human experience is to be understood. And again, at the very end of the tragedy, when Orth apostrophizes his dead "friend" and proclaims the law of money and the law of force, the music continues to say (though in terms quite different from those of the preceding duet) that this need not be, that man is capable of far finer things. Here, then, is the second and, to my mind and ear, the unquestionably humane conclusion of the opera. It is Weill who says the last word, the all-important word. Yet Neher and his associates have seen fit to dispense with the final aria altogether, and have tried to say in the revised libretto something that the music already says far more eloquently.

Throughout the history of music, operas have been subjected to ferocious cutting and alteration; but it is doubtful if a composer's intentions have ever been so radically contradicted, and so soon after his death. Had the revival of 'Die Bürgschaft' been the failure which it might well have been, the whole case, seen against its cultural and political background, would have been an almost Brechtian tragedy. As it was, the sincere and sometimes inspired efforts of all concerned resulted in a kind of equivocal triumph. Even in its mutilated form, I believe 'Die Bürgschaft' emerged for many people as an opera that ranks very high among those written between the wars. As soon as some opera-house has the courage to stage the work in its original form and without any attempt to soften its apparent harshness, we shall have still more conclusive evidence of its enduring power. But in the meantime we can see that while the passage of time has deprived the opera's topical and subjective elements of their original connotation, their firm basis in universal and objective truth ensures a more permanent validity. Supported by a remarkably individual stage technique<sup>6</sup>—one German critic remarked that the work might still become one of the models for the musical theatre of the future—'Die Bürgschaft' has much to say to us to-day. Thus Weill may have come nearer than he knew to that familiar revolutionary attitude which is best expressed by inverting his own words: "I don't care about the present, I write for posterity". When his humanitarian instincts were most passionately aroused, as in 'Die Bürgschaft', he showed himself to be something very much more than an interesting marginal figure.

<sup>6</sup> One must nevertheless take into account the thoroughly absorbed influence of Stravinsky's 'Oedipus Rex', which Weill must have seen in Klemperer's production at the Kroll Opera in 1928. The static, "monumentalized" forms and the stylized characterization of 'Die Bürgschaft' clearly owe something to Stravinsky's example.